

CHAPTER 8:

Expectations for Child Outcomes, Assessment and Reporting

This chapter of the report describes expectations for child outcomes for children from birth to three years (ECED) and children from age three to start of primary schooling (PPE). It sets out whether and how these outcomes are assessed and recorded, and how child outcomes data are used to support the development of policy and practice. Within and between country similarities and variations in child outcomes expectations and practice will be highlighted.

Expectations for Child Outcomes

Expectations of outcomes for children will differ according to the age of the child, the overall policy aims of the country and the curriculum offered by the provider, and the cultural expectations around early childhood as a formative period in a child's life (OECD, 2012b). Studies have shown that those countries which emphasize ECE as providing a preparation for school generally favor a narrower set of academic outcomes for children (such as literacy and numeracy). Other countries focus on a child's value base and preparation to participate as an active citizen, or on a child's generic or executive functioning skills as a learner, or on a child's general health and well-being, and social and emotional adjustment (OECD, 2006, 2012a; Pascal, & Bertram, 2012). Despite this diversity, many countries have shared expectations for ECE that focus particularly on nurturing children's social and emotional, physical and language development. However, some countries also focus more specifically on developing children's early literacy and numeracy skills, with the intention of ensuring what might be termed "school readiness."

The outcomes that any ECE setting works toward may be affected by its philosophical approach or the culture of the community it serves. Parents' expectations of their children's achievements may also impact on the outcomes a setting aims to achieve. For example, Li and Rao (2005) reported that in Hong Kong and Singapore there was a demand from parents for greater emphasis to be given to pre-academic skills than was mandated by the national authorities.

The ECES gathered information from the study countries about nationally, regionally or locally stated expectations for child outcomes in different areas of learning and development ([Table 35](#)).

Five of the study countries (Chile, Denmark, Estonia, the Russian Federation and the United States) have explicit expectations for child outcomes for children from birth to three years ([Table 35](#)). The Czech Republic, Italy and Poland have no explicitly stated expectations about child outcomes for these younger children. All the study countries have explicit expectations for child outcomes for children aged three years to primary school age (PPE). This evidence indicates that the study countries see early childhood as an important stage in children's learning and development, and expect their services to contribute to enhancing this, particularly as children move towards primary school.

Table 35: Expectations for child outcomes in different areas of learning and development for children aged 0–3 years (ECED) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (PPE)

Country	Level	Explicit expectations for child outcomes in areas of learning												
		Personal and emotional development	Social development, including citizenship, values	Attitudes and dispositions to learning	Physical development and health education	Language development and communication skills	Reading and literacy skills	Mathematical skills	Understanding the natural world	Science	Technology and digital world	Expressive arts, music and creativity	Second/foreign language	Religious and spiritual
Chile	ECED	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○
Czech Republic	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Denmark	ECED	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Estonia	ECED	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Italy	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Russian Federation	ECED	●	○	○	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○
United States	ECED	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○

Key:

● Yes, there are expectations for child outcomes.

○ No, there are not expectations for child outcomes in this area.

n/a There are no stated expectations for child outcomes during this phase.

The data indicate a broad range of learning and development expectations in participating countries throughout this age phase, with all the study countries reflecting the balance in the curriculum that was identified in Chapter 7. In particular, all countries identified expectations for learning in personal, social and emotional development, physical development and health, and language development and communication skills throughout this age phase. For example, Chile reported that they have a particular focus on three main areas of learning for children under the age of three years: social and personal development; communication; and relation with the cultural and natural environment. Other countries reported a similar focus, and the emphasis was generally on promoting a wide range of learning outcomes. The range of expectations identified

also reflects a balance between cognitive and non-cognitive areas of learning, with more “subject based” learning outcomes expected as the children move into pre-primary education.

Summary Finding 32

The study countries take rather a broad view of children’s learning and the outcomes that early education settings might support, including a range of cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes, and do not focus on a narrow range of children’s learning outcomes in this phase of education.

Assessment Methods

A recent paper by the World Bank (2013) defined assessment as the process of gathering and evaluating information on what students know, understand, and can do in order to make an informed decision about next steps in the educational process. Methods can be as simple as oral questioning and response, or as complex as computer-adaptive testing models based on multifaceted scoring algorithms and learning progressions. Decisions based on the results may vary from how to design system-wide programs to improve teaching and learning in schools, to identifying next steps in classroom teaching, to determining which applicants should be admitted to a setting. An assessment system is a group of policies, structures, practices, and tools for generating and using information on student learning and achievement. The authors of the World Bank paper defined effective assessment systems as those that provide information of sufficient quality and quantity to meet stakeholder information and decision-making needs in support of improved education quality and student learning. The paper argued that meeting these information and decision-making needs in a way that has the support of key political and other groups in society will contribute to the longer term sustainability and effectiveness of the assessment system.

Recent policy agendas of governments, international organizations, and other stakeholders increasingly highlight the importance of assessment for monitoring and improving student learning and achievement levels, and the concomitant need to develop strong systems for student assessment (McKinsey, 2007). This recognition is linked to growing evidence that many of the benefits of education (cultural, economic, and social) accrue to society only when learning occurs (OECD, 2010). For example, an increase of one standard deviation in scores on international assessments of reading and mathematics achievement levels has been linked to a 2% increase in annual growth rates of gross domestic product per capita (OECD, 2012a).

Over the last twenty years, many countries have started implementing assessment exercises or building on existing assessment systems (OECD, 2012b). In addition, there has been huge growth in the number of countries participating in international comparative assessment exercises such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), but few have tackled the challenge of assessing children’s learning and development outcomes in ECE, despite the recognition of similar system demands and challenges. This means that cross-national assessments of learning outcomes for younger children are rare and underdeveloped, being controversial and perceived as difficult to achieve.

For example, Denmark reported that the recent introduction of testing of language development for under-threes has been criticized because it takes too much of the pedagogue's time and it is considered to be unhealthy for small children to be tested. The Russian Federation also stated that they believed child outcomes cannot be directly assessed, and that they do not form the basis of identifying the real achievements of children.

Given the wider dialogue about the value, purpose and ethics of assessing young children, the ECES gathered evidence on the existence of child assessments for children from birth to primary school entry in the study countries and the assessment methods used (Tables 36 and 37).

Table 36: Existence of national or subnational child assessments in different areas of learning and development for children aged 0–3 years (ECED) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (PPE)

Country ^{a, b}	Level	Existence of national or typical subnational assessments of children in different areas of learning													
		Personal and emotional development	Social development, including citizenship and values	Attitudes and dispositions to learning	Physical development and health	Language development and communication skills	Reading and literacy skills	Mathematical skills	Understanding the natural world	Science	Technology and digital world	Expressive arts, music and creativity	Second/foreign language	Religious or spiritual knowledge	'School readiness' (testing)
Chile	ECED	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	PPE	●	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Czech Republic	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Estonia	ECED	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●
Poland	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	●

Key:

- Yes, there are national or typical subnational child assessments in this learning area.
- No, there are no national or typical subnational child assessments in this learning area.
- n/a There are no national or typical subnational child assessments during this phase.

Country specific notes:

^a Denmark reported that it does not conduct national assessments of children under the age of three years, and this is not required by national law, but that some local communities do require centers to test the children. Research has shown that at subnational level all the suggested areas of learning in the above Table can be assessed.

^b Italy reported that only local assessments exist and are not generalized to the entire population of a given region of children in ISCED 0. Several universities are working on children's assessments (mainly with observations, checklists, tasks and play), but no one system is used at regional level. A potentially regional system based upon the EDI (Early Development Instrument) has been recently piloted at PPE level in Emilia Romagna region.

Four of the eight study countries conducted formal child assessments during ISCED Level 0 at a national or subnational level, including Chile, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Poland (Table 36). Of these countries, only Chile and Estonia reported that under-threes are formally assessed in early childhood centers. Denmark reported that there are no national assessments of children during this age phase, but that some local communities do require centers to test their children. Denmark, Italy, the Russian Federation and the United States reported that they do not formally assess the children at either ECED or pre-primary level.

In the four countries that conduct formal assessments, the areas of learning assessed included personal and emotional development, social development, physical development, and health, language and communication development, reading and literacy development, and mathematical development. This suggests that assessments are used to capture a broad range of learning outcomes, which include both cognitive and non-cognitive competencies (executive learning skills) and are not narrowly focused on areas for “school readiness” such as literacy and mathematics.

The methods of assessment used to capture children’s learning and development outcomes in the study countries were also explored (Table 37).

Table 37: Assessment methods used for children aged 0–3 years (ECED) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (PPE)

Country	Level	Assessment methods used			
		Practitioner observations	Standardized tasks	Standardized tests	Mixture of methods
Chile	ECED	○	●	●	○
	PPE	○	●	●	○
Czech Republic	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	○	○	○	○
Denmark ^a	ECED	○	○	○	●
	PPE	○	○	○	●
Estonia	ECED	●	○	○	○
	PPE	●	●	●	●
Poland	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	○	○	●

Key:

● Yes, this assessment method is used.

○ No, this assessment method is not used.

n/a There are no national child assessments during this phase.

Country specific note:

^a Some communities in Denmark require centers to test children, however, it is not required by law. Different methods for assessments are used by local communities, including observations, tasks and tests.

In the countries that have national assessments, practitioner observations are used in Estonia and Poland (PPE only); standardized tasks are used in Chile and Estonia (PPE only); and standardized tests are used in Chile and Estonia (PPE only) (Table 37). The evidence also indicates that Estonia and Poland (and Denmark where centers assess) use a mixture of methods to assess children’s learning outcomes.

Summary Finding 33

National child assessments are not commonly conducted in ECE. The findings reveal that assessments, when conducted, are used in the study countries to capture a broad range of learning outcomes, which include cognitive development, executive functioning and social-emotional development, and are not narrowly focused solely on areas of traditional or perceived “school readiness”, such as literacy and mathematics. The methods of assessment used to capture children’s learning and development in the study countries are reported to include practitioner observations and standardized tests, with a mixture of methods prevalent.

Reporting of Outcomes Data

Child outcomes data allow researchers, policymakers, providers and parents to draw clearer conclusions regarding the beneficiaries of ECE, what these benefits and outcomes are, and what conditions enable these outcomes to be achieved. The audiences for these data are varied, and there is a range of reporting mechanisms and processes available, from ICT, internet websites and other mass dissemination mechanisms, to local, face-to-face documentation and feedback, designed to ensure such data are transparent and accessible to children, parents and individual service providers, as well as policymakers. The four study countries that collect child outcomes data provided information on the recipients of the data (Table 38).

Table 38: Recipients of reporting of child outcomes data for children aged 0–3 years (ECED) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (PPE)

Country	Level	Child outcomes data is reported to							
		Setting	Parents	Providers	Local body with responsibility for ECE	Regional body with responsibility for ECE	National body with responsibility for ECE	Published in media	Published on internet
Chile	ECED	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●
	PPE	○	○	○	○	○	●	○	●
Czech Republic	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	○	●	●	●	○	●
Estonia	ECED	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
	PPE	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Poland	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	●

Key:

● Yes, this assessment method is used.

○ No, this assessment method is not used.

n/a There are no national child assessments during this phase.

The evidence from the four study countries indicates that the data are reported to a range of recipients. In Chile, it is primarily reported to the national bodies with responsibility for ECE and then to the wider public via the internet. The Czech Republic and Poland report this data to a wide range of recipients, including the setting, parents, local and regional bodies with responsibility for ECE, and also to the wider public through the internet. In contrast, settings and parents are the primary recipients in Estonia, as they consider this data to be confidential and so are reluctant to report it more widely.

Summary Finding 34

The findings indicate that child outcomes data are reported to a wide group of recipients, each of whom can potentially use the data to inform the development of educative practice for young children in the home, in the setting, in the locality, region and country as a whole. The data also indicate that a range of reporting platforms are used from ICT, internet websites and other mass dissemination mechanisms, to local, face-to-face interactions, documentation and feedback.

Use of Child Outcomes Data

Information about children's outcomes can be used to inform the development of learning for children at individual, cohort and population levels, to monitor ECE system performance for accountability purposes, to direct resources efficiently towards need, to inform program planning and development, or provide information to parents to engage them in their child's learning and to identify any inequality of outcomes delivered by the system for certain groups of the population. The recent global economic crisis and pressure on education funding also emphasizes the need for accountability and "value for money" and for evidence-based policy making, as well as for rating program quality for improvement purposes, highlighting trends in the sector and contributing to parental choice. However, child outcomes data related to early childhood policy is often retrospectively derived from secondary analysis of datasets created for other age groups and purposes, and such limitations lead to uncertain policy making at a national level and to a lack of reliable comparative data at an international level (OECD, 2006; Pascal, & Bertram, 2012; Pascal et al., 2012).

Given this wider data challenge, the ECES explored how child outcomes data are used to inform policy and practice within the four study countries that collect it ([Table 39](#)).

Table 39: Use of child outcomes data for children aged 0–3 years (ECED) and children aged 3 to the start of primary school (PPE)

Country	Level	Use of results of national or typical subnational child assessments to inform the development of ECE policy and practice nationally								
		For accountability and performance management of settings	For commissioning of providers	By central body to inform strategic planning of ECE	By regional body to inform strategic planning of ECE	By local body to inform strategic planning of ECE	By providers to inform strategic planning of ECE	By settings to inform planning of ECE programs	By ECE practitioner groups to inform planning of ECE programs	By parent bodies to inform parental choice of ECE
Chile	ECED	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
	PPE	○	○	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Czech Republic	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	ECED	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
	PPE	●	○	○	○	○	○	●	●	○
Poland	ECED	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	PPE	●	○	●	●	●	○	○	○	○

Key:

● Yes, outcomes data are used for this purpose.

○ No, outcomes data are not used for this purpose.

n/a There are no national child assessments during this phase

The evidence reveals that child outcomes data are used very differently in each study country that collects data. In Chile, the child assessment data is primarily used by the central body to inform strategic planning of ECE services. In Estonia, the child assessment data are used for accountability and performance management of settings, and to inform the planning of programs within settings. In this country practitioner groups also use the data to inform the wider planning of programs for the under-threes. The Czech Republic uses the results of child assessments to inform the full range of policies and practice development in pre-primary education, from national strategic planning, through to regional, local system and setting planning. It is also used to inform parental choice. In Poland, the assessment data are used for accountability and performance management, and by regional and local bodies to inform the strategic planning of pre-primary programs. In Poland, parents also have the choice to show their child's assessment to teachers in elementary school if special educational needs are present.

Summary Finding 35

The study countries illustrate the potential value of having child outcomes data at a national and subnational level to inform, evaluate and improve system performance, as well as at setting level to inform children's learning plans and setting development. However, few countries reported typical national or typical subnational assessments of children's learning and development for children at different stages in ISCED 0. The countries that reported having typical assessments reported using the information to inform system performance, as well as at the setting level to inform children's learning plans and setting development. There continues to be hesitancy in some countries (Denmark, Italy and the Russian Federation) to collect and use child outcomes data for ethical, methodological, and administrative reasons.

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